United Nations E/C.19/2008/L.5

Economic and Social Council

Distr.: Limited
29 April 2008

Original: English

Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues
Seventh session
New York, 21 April-2 May 2008
Item 7 of the provisional agenda*
Half-day discussion on indigenous languages

1. It has been estimated that up to 90 per cent of the world's languages will become extinct within the next 100 years if current trends continue. An overwhelming majority of those languages are indigenous languages. Languages are not only a communication tool, but an intrinsic aspect of identity, traditional knowledge, systems of values, world views and tradition. Consequently, policies of assimilation that lead to the destruction of languages have often been considered a form of ethnocide or linguistic genocide. It is essential, not only for the preservation of linguistic and cultural diversity, but also for the preservation of traditional indigenous knowledge and biological diversity, to take immediate and effective measures to prevent the impending irretrievable loss that language extinction entails. This can be done only by guaranteeing indigenous peoples' right to self-determination and ensuring that all of their rights are protected and promoted.

2. The United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples and other relevant human rights standards should be utilized as the basis on which to develop policies and laws related to the promotion and strengthening of indigenous languages.

Recommendations

3. The Permanent Forum notes that the Nordic Saami Convention stands out as an example of good practice in empowering indigenous peoples to preserve and revitalize their languages. The Permanent Forum therefore encourages the Nordic States to support the process of the Saami Convention with a view to their adoption of it in due course.

4. The Permanent Forum invites the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) to call jointly for a world conference on linguistic diversity, indigenous languages, identity and education. The United Nations Member States are encouraged to provide political and financial support for such a conference.

* E/C.19/2008/1.

08-32199 (E) 290408

5. The Permanent Forum calls on States to immediately support indigenous peoples' language revitalization efforts. This includes supporting the master apprentice programmes and assessment of language status, and the creation of increased links between formal schools and the family so that there is a continuous use of indigenous languages.

6. The Permanent Forum welcomes the report of the international expert group meeting on indigenous languages, held in New York from 8 to 10 January 2008, and recommends that States and United Nations agencies engage with indigenous peoples to develop strategies to implement the recommendations of the report.

7. In particular, the Forum emphasizes the recommendations from the expert group meeting contained in paragraphs 40 (c), (d), (e), (f) and (n), 42 (a), (b), (c) and (f), 43 (b), 44 (b) and (c) and 45 of its report (E/C.19/2008/3).